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ABSTRACT

Although the focus of this issue of the "Virginia English Bulletin" is on making effective assignments, most of the articles also emphasize the importance and power of writing. Articles deal with the following topics: (1) the use of I-search (as explained by Kenneth Macrorie in "Searching Writing") as a form of research paper that narrates the process of discovering information while explaining the information that is found (P. Parnell); (2) a young writers summer workshop that involved participants in an intensive five-phase writing program (M. Figgins, D. Butler, A. Seaman, and J. Strzepek); (3) the use of prewriting activities to develop sensory awareness and to strengthen the power of observation (B. R. Brite); (4) the use of nonverbal films to stimulate student writing (J. H. Nixon); (5) focus and closure in writing (W. Bell); (6) the use of journal writing to help students learn to express themselves (A. S. Hill); (7) techniques for paragraphing (C. C. Smith); (8) teaching methods for the composition research paper (M. Barr); (9) the use of an academic journal to increase student opportunities to engage in expressive writing (W. P. Self); (10) writing in response to counseling activities (P. Bizzaro and S. Werner); (11) the use of a scrapbook journal to stimulate writing themes (G. Smith); and (12) the importance of personal choice in writing topics (R. J. Murphy, Jr.) (HOD)

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VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH WINTER 1982



Virginia English Bulletin

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TWO STACKS LATER: Making Effective Assignments

Alan M. McLeod

When we decided on this focus topic, I thought we'd receive numerous manuscripts addressing various aspects of English language arts. How little had I realized the impact of the recent emphasis on writing! The manuscripts received suggest we should have had "Making Effective Writing Assignments" as the focus. "Doesn't anyone teach literature or language?" I mused, and only half in jest, to colleagues at the recent VATE Conference in Hampton.

Don't misinterpret this message. I'm pleased we're teaching writing; in fact, I've directed writing institutes and conducted endless workshops on the subject. As an editor and teacher I'm a firm believer in the importance and power of writing; and as an individual I find insight, discouraging or comforting, through the act of composing. Writing is essential, and it's about time we gave it due recognition in our teaching. What is disturbing, however, is that we also teach something about the power of literature to inform our lives; the capacity to communicate effectively through language appropriate to the occasion; speaking, listening, reading, media. We're moving into an era in which computers will expand learning and teaching capacities. Yet not one article focuses on these subjects, although a few do blend literature and writing or suggest imaginative, useful ways to involve students in writing. Are we enamored of this new discovery to the exclusion of other responsibilities? I think not; rather, we are finally recognizing that writing is a process and we are sharing our discovery.

In making this assignment, then, I was only partially effective. We have some fine articles on aspects of teaching writing. So be it. Writing has been too long neglected. I hope this issue is evidence that writing is beginning to be taught not only well but seriously. The articles suggest that we are recognizing by teaching writing and having them write we improve student writing ability and product; that attention to indeterminate factors such as nomenclature, exercises, and diagramming is rightfully diminishing to permit more time for writing itself. It's about time! . . . Readers may be interested that the Spring 1982 VEB, "Teaching Exceptional Students," has been selected for incorporation in the ERIC system.

Congratulations to VATE's 1983 Officers

President: Anne Kuhta

President Elect: Judy Self

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VATE Distinguished Service Award

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Dr. Richard A. Meade was presented VATE's first Distinguished Service Award in 1980. Dick Meade, Professor Emeritus of English Education at the University of Virginia, is well known to VATE and NCTE members for his truly distinguished service to the profession. The text that follows was used by Robert Small, Professor of English Education at Virginia Tech, in making the presentation on behalf of VATE.*

It is my profound honor to present to Richard Meade the VATE Distinguished Service Award. With love and unselfishness over nearly all of VATE's history, Richard Meade has guided and shaped our organization so that it called forth the best we had in us. He has been twice President of VATE and for many years has served as our liaison to NCTE. Projects, studies, production of materials—his fine, true hand is evident everywhere.

Few of us in this room tonight have not been touched by him directly, and all of us are infinitely better for that touch. No one in this room—teacher, supervisor, administrator—has not been influenced by his wisdom. If you are a part of English in Virginia, you are better because of Richard Meade. Gently, kindly, with gentlemanly restraint but firm insistence, he has shaped us into teachers who care for our students, who see English as important, but who realize that our goal is not English, but English in the lives of our students.

His influence is, of course, much wider than Virginia. Through his skillful shaping of students, it reaches to Georgia and Kentucky; Kansas and California; through NCTE, it reaches to the Adolescent Literature Assembly and the Middle School Assembly. As one of its founders, his own role in NCTE's Conference on English Education is profound.

Still, it is for his labors to improve the teaching of English in Virginia that we honor him tonight. What is there in our state that relates to the teaching and learning of English that Dr. Meade has not enriched? Certification standards? He has been the leading figure in repeated efforts to raise and broaden them. Textbook selection? No one's voice has carried more weight in the constant effort to improve the books we use with our students. Censorship? No one has given us a stronger base on which to stand as we face these conflicts. The English Curriculum? Look at the Virginia Beach Curriculum and the many others that he has helped to build. His influence is everywhere.

Many people here tonight could present this award with greater articulateness—Mary Barnes could, as could Alan McLeod or Frances Wimer. Charles Stallard could, as could Paul Slayton. Or we could have brought Bill Peters from Kentucky or Guy Ellis from Georgia to tell you what Richard Meade means to them. I have been chosen to speak for Virginia. Richard Meade is VATE's best and finest. We are honored by having him as a member of our organization. We honor our organization by honoring him.

Therefore, Richard Meade, we ask you to accept the Virginia Association of Teachers of English Distinguished Service Award.

Affiliate Student Writing Contest: Winning Essay

TIFFANY RICKS

Displayed at the door to Old Dominion University's library in Norfolk, Virginia is a collection of books boasting a variety of such classics as the *Random House Dictionary*, Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s *Cat's Cradle*, and perhaps most notably, Aldous Huxley's controversial *Brave New World*. These are works which are and have been used extensively in Virginia Beach Schools to educate the city's young people—works which are in danger of censorship. What does this mean?

When Henrik Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House* in the early nineteenth century, authorities banned the play. They feared that women might "get ideas," be influenced to uprise, leave their husbands and children. They were shocked by Nora's "insolence" and feared the effects of Ibsen's play on their comfortable routine lives. Are authorities today shocked by Huxley's predictions? Are they afraid that comfortable routine may evolve into a mechanical existence in which human beings are classified as intellectual robots and births are a product of technology, not intimacy? No. Huxley's novel is being considered for censorship on the basis that its contents might inspire youngsters to promiscuity. This assumption borders on the ridiculous.

Consider the facts: (1) In Virginia Beach, the rate of teenage pregnancies exceeds one-thousand per year, (2) In the State of Virginia, there are over twenty-two thousand teenage pregnancies per year. It is doubtful that any of these pregnancies resulted from a young girl reading *Brave New World*. Maybe the rate of teenage pregnancies would be lower if more young people stayed home to read Huxley's novel.

Huxley himself recognized an important fact in 1953, twenty-two years after he wrote *Brave New World*:

That we are being propelled in the direction of *Brave New World* is obvious. But no less obvious is the fact that we can if we so desire refuse to co-operate with the blind forces that are propelling us.

In the past, these "blind forces" included Hitler, Trotsky, and King James. Today they are composed of prominent authorities in what is considered a democratic society. There is nothing, however, that is democratic about controlling thought. Book censorship is a method for "the enemies of freedom [to] systematically pervert the resources of language in order to wheedle or stampede their victims into thinking, feeling, and acting as they, the mind manipulators want them to think, feel, and act." It probably never crossed Aldous Huxley's mind when he wrote these words in *Brave New World Revisited* that his own novel, *Brave New World* would someday be attacked by such "mind-manipulators." Huxley intended to educate future generations, prepare them for what might happen.

Shouldn't children and young adults be educated thusly? If our society is to become a tanglement of mechanical routine and technological births, shouldn't tomorrow's adults be prepared and equipped to handle these advances?

On Friday, March 5, 1982, Nancy Burnett stated in an interview that "Book censorship has become such an issue in our schools that we could eventually end up with no books." At the present rate of censorship, this horror is within the realms of possibility. With no books, there could be no education, no new ideas. With neither education nor books, what chance would today's youth ever have of conquering that "Brave New World"?

Tiffany Ricks was a senior at Green Run High School last year. Her essay won the VBATE-American Officers' Wives Club Writing Contest.

Make Re-search Into Real Search: The Quest

PATRICIA PARNELL

"Allow a subject to choose you that you want intensely to know . . . Investigate something you are interested in that will fulfill a need in your life."

Ken Macrorie, *Searching Writing*

I-Search, as Macrorie explains in *Searching Writing*, is a form of research paper which narrates the process of discovering information while it explains the information that is found. Macrorie emphasizes the selection of a topic which is of immediate personal interest to the student; he also stresses the use of primary sources, interviews, letters, and original documents, as well as personal involvement in the subject whenever possible in "hands-on" activities.

Macrorie has systematized and adapted for the classroom an investigative approach which is frequently found in magazine articles, news feature writing, and many scientific and technical papers. The writer states a problem, recounts his or her efforts to find information, and retells the information discovered and the results of the search. The product is the research paper in its most significant form.

Last winter I worked with I-Search assignments in my Advanced Composition elective; a team-taught Honors American Civilization course; a review of I-Search papers produced by other eleventh grade English teachers; and as a consultant to the Fairfax County government curriculum for English as a Second Language students. The experiences convinced me of I-Search's validity as a dramatic means of involving students in the information-gathering process. The final papers were the most interesting to read of any student research papers I have ever received:

- In I-Search, the topic relates directly to the student's own life.
- I-Search's information-gathering and problem-solving skills help ESL students in other real-life situations.
- Interviewing strengthens the students' speaking and listening skills.
- Word-for-word copying without attribution and other forms of plagiarism, sometimes a problem with students who are insecure about their English skills, are eliminated by the I-Search narrative.
- The story of a quest is easier and more interesting to write than formal objective exposition.

I introduced I-Search into my senior Advanced Composition course with one totally unexpected result: three students dropped the class. Their apparently negative response actually demonstrates the most positive aspects of the I-Search assignment.

Alice chose to write on "Teen-Age Alcoholism." She bogged down on the beginning steps of I-Search: Why is this problem important to me? What do I already know about this problem? Although I suggested she consider changing her topic, she continued to put off writing the paper. Then Alice announced she was dropping the course to become an aide to the drama teacher.

Crystal chose "Teen-Age Abortion." Again, she could not or would not answer the initial I-Search questions. After several weeks of procrastination, she changed her topic to "Oceanography." The paper finally came in right at the end of the grading period, a traditional "report" apparently copied almost verbatim from a career pamphlet with no attempt to follow the I-Search format. Annoyed at her nine-weeks grade, Crystal switched from Advanced Composition to Advanced Typing.

The I-Search assignment, I realized, immediately eliminates the phony, empty research topics that teachers know all too well.

For both teacher and student, I-Search requires more time and commitment than the traditional research paper. Because the problems are real, information may be difficult or impossible to find. One student, however, wrote to King Olaf of Norway—and received a reply. The search itself is a valuable learning and growing process, and I found students more excited than I had with the traditional research paper. In the American Civilization class, students researched one aspect of their family history, and often the entire family became involved in the information-gathering process; students had the thrill of seeing a great-grandmother's name on a ship's list of immigrant passengers or of reading the military records of a great-great uncle who fought in the Civil War. "I was the first person in a hundred years to read that file," Chet marveled after examining one resource in a research facility.

When the students began writing their papers, I gave them Macrorie's suggested four-part organization:

1. Why is this topic important to me?
2. What do I already know about this topic?
3. What do I do to gain information on my topic?
4. What do I learn from my search?

I also recognized a need to help students narrow and focus their topics so that their information related directly to their own lives. Margaret's subject was "What tourist attraction do I want to see on my trip to California?" Her first draft contained a long section on notable California libraries. When questioned, Margaret said she had included the libraries because they were in the information she had found; her own interests were in movie stars and Disneyland. Other students floundered similarly in writing their first draft because they had not taken this refining step on their own.

As I reviewed the first set of papers written by my students and those of other English 11 teachers, I recognized another problem with the

I-Search assignment: for many students the search was real but the writing was not. Because of the personal nature of the topic, students became deeply involved in the excitement of the quest and in their efforts to solve the problems they had set for themselves. Once the search was completed, however, the task seemed finished; they felt no compelling personal need to write about it. As a result, many of the final papers lacked the intensity and enthusiasm the students had shared when they talked about their search.

To make the writing process more real to the students, I asked them to keep "Learning Logs," to write down the information they found as they found it. Learning Logs helped capture on paper the freshness and immediacy of the student's experience and were easily incorporated into the step-by-step narrative of the final draft.

Since writing has more meaning for students when they are writing for a "real" person, not just the teacher, I also built in the concept of *audience* from the beginning of the assignment. To the initial I-Search questions, I added an item on prospective readers: Who would be interested in learning about the search? Barbara VanOver, a colleague on the ESL curriculum revision team, included the concept of audience in her experiment with I-Search last winter. She found that students were more concerned with effective writing and more willing to revise when their papers would be read by public officials who might be influenced to take action because of their work. Two students selected as their topic a stretch of narrow, badly maintained road near their homes. Copies of their final papers were sent to Fairfax County authorities; the county has subsequently begun surveying the road, trying to determine responsibility for its maintenance. The searching itself creates reader involvement; consequently, an I-Search paper is potentially interesting to a wide audience, perhaps as a feature news article or essay for the school literary magazine.

Three papers from Advanced Composition students seem to exemplify the effectiveness of I-Search. The three seniors posed this question, "Should I take a year off between high school and college?" To the students' dismay and mine there was no published material on deferred admission in the guidance office, the career center, or the school library. If three of the seventeen seniors in the course were asking this question, surely other seniors had the same concern. In spite of this apparent need, however, nothing seemed available except some general comments from the counselors. Eventually, the students found one study on deferred admissions from the University of New South Wales, complete with questionnaires, interviews, and follow up. They interviewed college representatives and friends who had worked a year before entering college. Finally they discovered a section on deferred admissions in the Cornell catalogue, the only such reference they could find.

Their I-Search papers, revised, corrected, and neatly typed, are now filed in the library and in the career center, available as a resource to other students. One of the papers, by a mainstreamed ESL student who

is a Palestinian refugee, is used as a sample with the I-Search material⁶ in the ESL Government resource handbook. Because of the I-Search assignment, these three students have the satisfaction of knowing they have met a real need, important in their own lives and in the lives of fellow students.

STUDENT WORK SHEET: ORGANIZATION OF THE I-SEARCH PAPER

Part A: PRE-WRITING: Answer these questions before you begin gathering information on your topic.

1. What is the topic?
2. Why is this topic important to me?
3. What do I already know about this topic?
4. What specific questions do I want to answer on this topic?
OR/ What specific aspects of this topic are especially important to me?
5. Audience: Who will be interested in reading about my I-Search?
(You will revise your answers to these questions, following my suggestions, and include the revisions in the final draft of your I-Search paper.)

PART B: POST-WRITING CHECK LIST: Be sure you have answered these questions completely in your I-Search paper.

1. Have I revised my answers to Part A and included them in my final draft?
2. Have I included all the steps I took to gain information? Have I included and explained all the relevant information I learned from each source?
3. Have I stated the conclusion I reached on my topic and the actions I have taken based on my findings? Have I explained any additional information I need to find?
4. Is everything in this paper relevant to my topic?
5. Audience: Have I included all the information my readers will need in order to understand my I-Search?
6. Documentation: Have I used appropriate footnote form or other documentation to show the source of all information?
7. Bibliography: Have I listed all sources, including interviews?

Pat Parnell is an English teacher at J. E. B. Stuart High in Falls Church.

When Students are Free to Write: 1982 Summer Young Writers Workshop

MARGO FIGGINS, DEBORAH BUTLER, ALAN SEAMAN, and JOSEPH STRZEPEK

Last summer 109 teenagers fulfilled what cynics might say was an impossible dream. They spent two weeks of their vacation time *writing* as participants in the first Young Writers Workshop. There were three two-week sessions. The program was initiated by the Virginia Association of Teachers of English (VATE), and brought to fruition by the School of Education at the University of Virginia.

VATE set its idea in motion by assisting with publicity and mailings, encouraging participation through local affiliates, and donating \$200 toward student scholarships. The University of Virginia bid was accepted by the VATE Executive Board, and Joseph Strzepek (Planning Director), assisted by Deborah Butler (Summer Director), Margo Figgins (Assistant Program Director), and Alan Seaman (Head Counselor) began program development. When the first 41 participants arrived on June 20, applications had been screened, acceptance letters sent, and staff selected; guest poet Gregory Orr, storytellers Michael Prent and John and Joanne Branyon-Ward, and novelist-poet Claude C. Smith had agreed to offer special workshop sessions.

After the orientation evening, which included collaborative poems and an original staff drama, the participants began an intensive five-phase program. In the morning *Core Program*, master teachers modeled pre-writing techniques, approaches to journaling, the revision process, and small group feedback. The students wrote, revised, and conferred with both teachers and peers. When a specific writing genre was the focus, published writers in that mode consulted with the group. Students had their questions answered and their concerns treated seriously. This direct contact stirred them to experiment with unfamiliar forms like song writing, story telling, or journalistic reporting. It motivated them to refine work for the Workshop literary magazine, a product of the Core Program which published each writer's best effort.

The *Writing Hour*, from 12:30-1:30 p.m., provided the self-styled time every writer needs to give way to either "writer's fatigue" or "writer's frenzy." Most often, students chose to close the door behind them and write in the privacy of their room, or else sprawl on the dorm balcony over a second draft or new journal entry. Few slept. There was just too much to write about.

Writing Exploratories came next on a day's agenda. For two hours, groups of 6-8 students focused on one of seven particular writing areas—fiction, play-writing, poetry, journalism, scriptwriting, current events reporting, or writing through visual arts. This in-depth work resulted in various products: a daily newsletter; an art and poetry show; a videotape of retold fairytales; a scripted and staged one-act play; and numerous independent projects designed by students in collaboration with the supervising master teacher.

Recreational time, starting at 4:00 p.m., allowed participants to swim, play volleyball, or have a go at ultimate frisbee—to break loose from writer's cramp. The preference, however, seemed to be for activities that centered on different ways to perform writing. A multi-talented staff of counselors offered calligraphy, creative movement, improvisational drama, reader's theater, and writing for the Writer's Liturgy which prefaced an all-day Sunday outing at Sherando Lake in George Washington National Forest. "Just writing" was still a popular option for those who had an idea that wouldn't let go.

The energy of the participants was somehow cumulative, and quite often it peaked during the *Evening Encounters*. It was almost palpable on Creative Dramatics Night, when staff and students held each other captive with extem-

poraneous writing and acting that would make prime time T.V. tedious by comparison. It peaked again in discussions of existentialist writing after viewing *Rebel Without a Cause*, and again in a costume open house where the young writers danced expressively to sounds of "Craftwerk." The same energy surfaced as storyteller Michael Parent wrapped them in the magic threads of his tales. It brought them to their feet at the end of the Virginia Players' performance of *A Thousand Clowns*.

A walk around the dormitory balconies one evening revealed the workshop simmering productively in a number of ways. From the doorway of one of the suites came the sounds of guitar strumming and the pattering of several typewriters. A few students reclined in chairs on the balcony, discussing a freshly-completed short story. Near them, a staff intern leafed through the various revisions of a poem which a student had pruned to the most carefully-selected words. Several of the typed pages contained the penciled comments of a master teacher, as well as reactions of two other students.

There was a provocative informality in this environment. Writing rubbed against writing. Every work found an attentive audience, whether in the evening rap sessions, the Writer's Café, or the literary magazine. The students discovered that writing should not echo in vacuum; it should be shared and cheered, published and performed.

These young people arrived at the workshop wanting to write, but also with summer pumping in their veins. How could we give them what they wanted and the time off they needed as well? Our answer was "space"—the kind of space where they could practice what they already knew, interact with other writers, and experiment with new directions.

We thus observed their craft informing their lives. Like their writing, their lives could be seen as a process as well. The Young Writer's Workshop was designed to nurture this process of craft and life, giving way to unfolding insights and allowing each person his or her own pace. The students shared the advantage of fellowship and support from committed people—peers, teachers, counselors, consultants, authors, and directors. *Everyone* in the program wrote. Even the nurse-counselor brought a crowd to its feet with her first poem. Everyone learned how to listen better to themselves and to each other, and to share their work more effectively.

On the last night of each session, after the unveiling of the literary magazine, students signed each other's magazines and tried to say what the past two weeks had meant. One of the last workshopers to leave described her experience this way: "This has been the most important experience in my life so far." *So far*. No finalities—just many starts and stops, which eventually led to more graceful, more deliberate, yet more natural writing. And many expectations: "... so far."

Note: For information about next summer's workshop, write: The Young Writer's Workshop, University of Virginia, School of Education, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903.

Margo Figgins, a doctoral student at U.Va., has taught high school language and theatre arts for 12 years; Deborah Butler is Assistant Professor at North Carolina Wesleyan College; Alan Seaman is a graduate English and Education student, U.Va.; Joseph Strzepek is Associate Professor of English Education, U.Va., and Director of the Central Virginia Writing Project.

What Is Project BEST?

Project BEST (Basic Education Skills through Technology) is a cooperative effort involving both the federal, state, and local governments and the private sector in the planning and use of modern information technologies to improve the effectiveness of basic skills teaching and learning. It is funded by the Division of Educational Technology of the U.S. Department of Education. Project BEST began in November 1981 and will continue through August 1983.

What Is the Purpose of Project BEST?

A primary goal of the project is to create a network of states and professional organizations that will encourage the exchange of ideas, people, and information, and that can continue to grow and to function even after the work of the project is completed.

Specifically, the project will provide training and technical assistance to State Education Agencies (SEAs) in the areas of basic skills and technology. Increasing the abilities of SEAs to utilize advanced telecommunications technology and adding to their awareness of successful applications in the field will, in turn, strengthen state efforts to improve Local Education Agency and school capabilities.

How Will Project BEST Accomplish Its Goals?

The project staff will develop a variety of products, services, and linkages with people and resources in the public and private sectors to accomplish the above goals. They will include:

- written materials on the use of technology in basic skills education
- audio-video teleconferencing to present information on successful applications in the field
- an electronic mailbox to encourage information sharing
- a data bank that will include information on software; names of local experts available to assist SEAs and local school districts; and bibliographies of materials on educational technology, the use of technology in education, and the application of technology to basic skills education
- a series of ongoing working relations with industry, professional associations and state, regional, and local education groups

Technology will not only be the focus of the project, but also be the means by which sharing the gathering of information will take place.

Satellite teleconferencing and telecommunication linkages will be used for rapid exchange of information; *microcomputers* will be used to access various data bases, and the *electronic mailbox* will be used to assist with the specific needs of members of the network.

What Are the Planned Outcomes of Project BEST?

Outcomes can be expected at two levels. At the *state* level there will be:

- an inventory of the resources including hardware, software, and experts available in the state to assist Local Education Agencies and schools in the selection and use of technology
- a team of SEA experts who can provide technical assistance and training for Local Education Agencies and school personnel
- an information base that will enable states to make effective use of block grants to support basic skills education and purchases of technology
- familiarity with techniques and materials that rely on technology for use in inservice training programs

At the *national* level, working jointly with technology and basic skills professional associations, data bases are to be made available on technology-supported education in reading, communication skills, and mathematics. A series of print and audio-video training materials is also to be made available.

Who Is Working on Project BEST?

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) is the prime contractor for Project BEST. A national advisory board has been established to assist in the design of the project, to aid in its development, and to plan for the ongoing use of its products and services after the project concludes.

The National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and ERIC are among those represented on the National Advisory Board. Dr. Henry Ingle is directing the project;

Mr. Lewis Rhodes is serving as Associate Director for State Team Training, and Dr. Delores Deardorff, of Maryland Instructional Television, is Associate Director for Video Modules Productions. Ms. Ann Erdman and Dr. Frank Withrow are overseeing the effort for the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Bernard O'Donnell is representing the National Council of Teachers of English and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills on this board.

For further information write to Project BEST, c/o AECT, 1126 Sixteenth Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

ERIC Fact Sheet—1982

Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801

"All About Letters," New Edition. 64 pages, paper, 8½ x 11. Price: \$2.50 each; class sets of 20 or more, \$1.50 each.

The English Curriculum under Fire: What Are the Real Basics? edited by George Hillocks, Jr. 88 pages, paper. Price: \$5.75; NCTE members, \$5.00.

Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing, edited by Ronald A. Sudol. 187 pages, paper. Price: \$8.75; NCTE members, \$7.50.

Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction by Rudine Sims. 111 pages, paper. Price: \$6.00; NCTE members, \$5.50.

Language Connections, edited by Toby Fulwiler and Art Young. 190 pages, paper. Price: \$10.75; NCTE members, \$9.50.

Structuring for Success in the English Classroom: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1981-1982, edited by Candy Carter and the NCTE Committee. 148 pages, paper. Price: \$8.25; NCTE members, \$7.50.

Readers Theatre: Story Dramatization in the Classroom by Shirlee Sloyer. 134 pages, paper. Price: \$11.00; NCTE members, \$9.50.

Improving Spelling and Vocabulary in the Secondary School, by Richard E. Hodges. 55 pages, paper. Price: \$4.00; NCTE members, \$3.50.

The Students' Rights to Know by Lee Burress and Edward B. Jenkinson. 50 pages, paper. Price: \$2.25; NCTE members: \$2.00.

Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High Students, edited by Robert C. Small, Jr. 323 pages, paper. Price: \$6.75; NCTE members, \$5.75.

Prewriting Activities

BECKIE R. BRITE

When first assigned a composition course six years ago, I made a startling discovery. Until that time I had assumed students in a writing class could take out pen and paper and produce a masterpiece in fifty minutes. Certainly an erroneous assumption! They not only forgot pen and paper, but also could not write until they first *thought* about writing. There had to be some means of eliciting responses and generating ideas prior to the actual writing process. I set about reading on the subject and sought advice from fellow teachers. In the process, I discovered useful exercises that provide students a chance to rehearse before they compose, a warm-up period in which they are more concerned with stimulus than with syntax.

One group of successful prewriting activities that students especially enjoy are those designed to develop sensory awareness and to strengthen the powers of observation. Most helpful in this area are ideas I adopted from George Hillocks, Jr.'s *Observing and Writing* (NCTE, 1974). All too often when attempting to describe something, students fail to reveal the total impression; so I begin my unit on descriptive writing with a series of activities that encourage students to use all five senses.

To show my students that they don't always see what they are observing, I give each one a picture cut from magazines. These pictures have a similar theme. Students study their pictures carefully for five minutes; I then collect the pictures and ask students to make a list of everything they saw. After the initial groans and protests, the thinking begins. Invariably most students can list very few details. I collect the lists and, with the pictures displayed before the class, read aloud their work, asking students to match lists and pictures. Students are amazed to discover they cannot distinguish many of the pictures because their descriptions simply do not include enough concrete detail. They find they really did not see what they thought they did.

I use a variation of this activity as an ice breaker early in the school year. Rather than describe a picture that may contain several objects, students are asked to describe a single object—a shoe! Each student removes a shoe, puts it on the desk and writes a paragraph describing it. Of course, the class usually thinks I'm joking. They laugh and chatter for several minutes before I convince them I do indeed expect them to describe their shoes. As soon as students complete their paragraphs, I collect the work and they pile their shoes in the middle of the room. As I read the paragraphs aloud, individual students have to choose from the heap the shoe being described. Always included in the pile are those singular shoes—purple clogs or maroon ankle boots—that shout out, "Here I am!" These are easily recognized, but in a typical classroom there are also numerous sneakers and loafers of various shapes and sizes. So many times students fail to include that one important detail that

makes the shoe unique; therefore, shoes and papers cannot be matched. Students, because of this exercise, become more aware of the importance of close observation and vivid detail.

Because they tend to rely on the sense of sight, even when they are not really seeing, students do not use the other four senses when perceiving and describing the world around them. To help them "observe" with more than their eyes, I use a version of blindman's bluff. Students are paired; one is the blindman and the other the guide. The blindfolded student is guided around the campus and describes sounds, feelings, smells, and tastes. Not only do students respond to surroundings, they also find the language to communicate the sensory impressions. The student acting as guide records the oral descriptions. When students return to the classroom, we discuss the accuracy, conciseness, and effectiveness of their work. Students quickly discover the use of figurative language, particularly metaphor, in relating to the senses. Finally, students are assigned a descriptive essay in which they depict the school through all five senses.

I have learned a great deal since the day I walked into Basic Composition six years ago expecting students to write automatically. My students convinced me that I had to work to get them interested in writing. Not only did I have to instruct them in basic writing skills, I had to provoke a response. Those prewriting ideas I've used to elicit that response are by no means unusual, but they are new to students and they do work for me.

Becky Brite teaches at Swansboro High, Onslow County, North Carolina.

Scholastic Inc. sponsors a "Great Paperback Contest." Teachers, administrators and librarians receive prizes for descriptions of creative ways they help parents motivate children to read. Ten grand prize winners receive 100 paperbacks of their choice from the Scholastic Paperback Catalog, a free table-top book rack and a Readers' Choice book bag. Fifty runners-up receive a collection of Celebrated Books from Readers' Choice containing 50 books, 50 laminated activity cards, a teaching guide, an attractive storage case. Entries postmarked by December 31, 1982, should include name, address, school, grade level, subject, and phone number. Send letters, no more than four double-spaced typewritten pages, to Dr. Priscilla Lynch, Scholastic, Inc., 904 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

Nonverbal Films in Composition

JULIA H. NIXON

Several outstanding films are short stories, fables, or poetry conveyed through gestures and symbols. Many of these films can be used to stimulate student writing. They are especially valuable for the student who knows nothing to write about. Students become observers of a slice of life compact enough for them to grasp, to produce and explain their own interpretation of what they see. Here are some representative films I have found useful.

AN AUTUMN STORY: MRS. PENNYPACKER'S PACKAGE. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, 1968. 16 min. Mrs. Pennypacker, an elderly lady, examines the fruit and vegetable display in front of a grocery store. Noticing the time, she grabs her shopping bag, rushes to catch the bus, but inadvertently leaves a small basket on the sidewalk. Realizing her error, she gets off the bus and phones the grocer. He agrees to have a delivery boy take the box to the subway station. The boy bicycles through several obstacles until he finally delivers the package containing a frisky chihuahua to its owner. In her rush to buy a ticket and catch the subway, Mrs. Pennypacker again leaves the dog in the basket on the curb.

After watching this film, students can write a character sketch of Mrs. Pennypacker, giving details from the film to validate their opinions. Young students can speculate whether or not Mrs. Pennypacker really loves her dog and cite details from the film to support their views.

THE BLUE DASHIKI: JEFFREY AND HIS CITY NEIGHBORS. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1969. 14 min. The streets of Chicago are Jeffrey's playground while his mother works. He plays hand ball, draws chalk pictures on the sidewalk, and windowshops until a blue dashiki captures his attention and his desire. He gets odd jobs around the neighborhood to earn enough money to buy the dashiki. Trying it on, he discovers that the dashiki is too large, but the shopkeeper in the African store and a seamstress next door alter it to fit. His mother is surprised when he, wearing the dashiki, runs to meet her.

Students can write a paper describing one of the shops or the neighborhood in general, or they can write about the mother's thoughts when she sees Jeffrey wearing a new garment, or they can compare the way Jeffrey spends his Saturday with the way they usually spend the day.

CLOWN. Learning Corporation of America, 1969. 15 min. Clown, a dog belonging to a young Parisian street urchin, wanders off while its owner is playing cards on a park bench with friends. When the boy realizes his dog is gone, he searches through the streets asking people along the way if they have seen his dog. In desperation, he borrows a painting of Clown from an artist friend to see if anyone will recognize him. After giving up his search and wandering down the street alone, he is overjoyed to see Clown coming around the corner of a building. The boy claims no ownership, however, when he sees that Clown is guiding an old blind man down the street.

Students can empathize with this film as they write about the thoughts and feelings of the boy. They can also express their opinion about the advantages and disadvantages of living alone in a big city, or speculate concerning the thoughts of various people who observe the unkempt, ragged boy as he searches through the streets for his dog.

ZLATEH THE GOAT. Weston Woods, 1975. 20 min. The story, set in Poland, depicts the plight of the family of a Jewish furrier who is compelled to send his oldest son to sell their only goat. The weather has been mild; business has been too slow to earn enough money to feed the family or to buy the necessities for celebrating Hanukkah. As the boy hesitatingly leads the goat to town, a blizzard forces them to take refuge in a hay stack. For three days the boy and the goat sustain each other. After the blizzard subsides, they hurry home. The family is overjoyed at their arrival. Since the change in weather has greatly enhanced the furrier's business, there is no need to sell Zlateh.

This film can be used for a writing assignment which requires the student to relate what happened in the story. Such an activity gives the student writing practice in recall, description, and sequencing. Students can also read a copy of "Zlateh the Goat" in order to make a comparison between the film, what they wrote, and the original story. Students can also write the story from such different points of view as the mother, the butcher, the younger sister, or they can relate some of the things which the boy could have been thinking during the blizzard. More sophisticated students can write about the ecology in the film, or they can speculate concerning various outcomes of the story.

Julia Nixon teaches at Woodrow Wilson Junior High in Roanoke.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The spring 1983 issue of *Virginia English Bulletin* will have as its focus "Literature Still Worth Reading." Manuscripts, not to exceed 5-8 pages, should be sent to the editor. Authors are encouraged to address a specific work (classics, contemporary classics, literature for adolescents or for children): Why is the book still worth reading? What are successful ways to use the book in the classroom? Why do students respond to this book?

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 1983

Focus and Closure

WILMA BELL

"What was your Sunday School lesson about today?"

When I was a child, that dinner table question was as predictable at our house as the coconut-cake-with-the-seven-minute-icing that concluded every Sunday get-together of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My Sunday school teacher must have known it was asked at more tables than ours; she prepared us for it in a firm 11:55 A.M. ritual:

"Now who did we learn about today, children?" she'd address us, ungrammatically, perhaps, but with a commanding gesture. And we all knew that nobody was going to make a move toward the coat rack before it was answered and repeated by all.

Today this technique is called *closure*. Madilyn Hunter, principal of the University Elementary School at U.C.L.A., has compiled a profile of methods and strategies used by successful teachers (*Pursuing Professional Excellence*, Pittman Learning, Pab Alto: 1980). Closure is one component of her Model for Effective Teaching. I have used her techniques of *focus* and *closure* to enliven my everyday classroom routine. I recorded the results—sometimes disappointing, sometimes funny, sometimes heartening—throughout the last year.

The first six weeks, I led my students in an oral closure procedure daily, asking, "Now who can tell me what we've learned today?"

One-word answers were most common: "Prepositions." "Subjects." "S's on verbs."

I found myself elaborating upon their answers as papers shuffled, books got thrown into carrying bags, and the clock ticked toward bell time. After all, some parents might still be asking questions such as mine had at the dinner table! And they wanted to hear more than just, "prepositions."

The next six weeks, I decided to require a response from everyone, not just those quick to raise a hand at pack-up time. I had each student keep a notebook log, dating each entry and writing a personal closure statement for the day. Near the end of the marking period, I collected these logs and found entries like:

Today we read a dumb story about a dog.

Today Buck learned how to dig a hole in the snow to sleep in.

Today was Angie's birthday. Happy Birthday, Angie!

Needless to say, I faced a problem of quality control. So for the third six weeks I decided to sacrifice individual interpretation of the events of the day. I wrote the closure entries for their logs myself.

2/12/82 Today we learned a verb has an "s" on it if the subject is (a) he, (a) she, or (an) it.

Examples: Mr. Smith walks. He walks.

Mary carries boxes. She carries boxes.

The car runs. It runs.

But if I left it on the board from a previous class, I'd find the incoming class copying the entry furiously as soon as they sat down to make sure they didn't have to do it in a last-minute rush. Since, at that point, it was rote copying with no explanation or understanding, I had to find yet another direction. The overhead projector proved an easy move. I made up the closure statement ahead of time and revealed it after we had "given it our all" for about forty-five minutes.

With this strategy came a bonus. The closure statement was right at hand the next day, often applicable as a jumping-off point for the next phase of whatever we were studying, a direct lead-in to the lesson, or *focus*. Focus is the teacher's statement of the day's objective; a strategy calculated to bring the student's minds in out of the halls, or off the walks, and fine-tune them to the lesson about to be presented. A possible focus for the day following the log for 2/12/82 would be:

Could someone please tell me what we learned yesterday?" (A student would respond by reading his closure from yesterday.)
"Yes, thank you, Wayne. We learned that verbs with singular subjects have an "s" on them in the present tense. Now today we're going to re-write a story. You all know how stories are usually told in the past tense. Well, today we're going to change a story into the present tense and put s's on the verbs that need them. 'Father worked on the roof' is going to become 'Father works on the roof.'

And so on. Hopefully, everyone will know where he or she is headed by this time and what accomplishment is expected by the end of the period.

With this strategy came the solution to another problem. I could simply call upon students to read their closure statements from the day before. This saved me the laborious task of checking logs and eliminated the problem of last-minute log-borrowers. No one any longer begged, borrowed, or stole whole logs for a grade.

As a teaching strategy, it added, I felt, to the over-all success of many students in the learning-content area specifically earmarked for re-testing in the spring. There was an average of fourteen points improvement in their scores, a much better gain than any of my classes had had before. Moreover, focus and closure gave a structure to the class period. And on the days we departed from that structure the departure seemed

all the more radical, hence all the more enjoyable. In the end, I was gratified by the results it helped to bring about and glad I had not abandoned it when it did not seem to be working for me earlier in the year.

Wilma Bell is a teacher at Fairfield Middle School in Henrico County.

The Foundation for Exceptional Children's program to recognize achievements of handicapped young people is entitled YES, I CAN! It awards certificates to youth who overcome barriers caused by disability or public misconception, encouraging them to seek their highest potential, and increasing public awareness of the abilities, aspirations and normal personal qualities of disabled people. YES, I CAN! is funded by a grant from the Shell Companies Foundation, Incorporated.

To receive a Certificate of Achievement, a disabled young person, age 2-21, must be nominated by two persons in any one of the following categories:

- Academics
- Arts
- Athletics
- Employment
- Extracurricular Activities
- Community Service
- Independent Living Skills

To receive nomination forms, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

YES, I CAN!

Foundation for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091

All nomination forms must be postmarked no later than
January 15, 1983.

Confessions of a Theoretically Lousy Teacher of Journal Writing

ADA S. HILL

How did I find success at being a lousy teacher of what one of my students referred to as "more of a nuisance than spelling assignments"? (Student comments are presented as they were written.) A teacher whose students did not keep journals made a point of telling me about the second six-weeks of each school year that such-and-such a student was writing all of his entries the night before journals were due. And, yes, I could tell when all the entries were exactly one-page long, done in the same color ink and on the same subject, but in less and less legible handwriting as the dates progressed. And, yes, there were a few students who, when asked what they thought of journal writing, said,

I don't like journal writing. I don't have time to sit and write and usually, I don't have anything worth writing about.

and

I don't write anything interesting in my journal therefore it stinks. I didn't care too much for writing then because mine bored me to death.

With these students, I failed—not so much for not inciting their enthusiasm about journal writing, but more so for not helping them to legitimize the interesting parts of themselves, whatever the forum. These students were in the very small minority—thank goodness.

My system can best be described as loose. I never did the majority of things that Elbow, Macrorie, Liner and Kirby, Fader, and the Judies say to do in regard to journal writing. My below-average students had to write in their journals twice a week, the average—three times, the above-average—four, and the advanced placement—five. The students could write on anything—pot, pills, sex, violence (all the usual television topics)—absolutely anything, just so long as it was of interest to them. The subject really did not matter, because I never read the journals. The journals belonged to the students, and journals should be, in my opinion, private stuff. Once every three or four weeks, I would take a day while the students did seat-work and check the journals for the requisite number of pages. The students watched me check off the pages right before their eyes. Privacy, you see, was of utmost importance, and heaven forbid if you ever left your journal at home: mothers love to read that kind of stuff. One of my students talked about this fear when he said, "Most people are afraid, as I am, to expose too much of themselves, afraid that the feelings they express are going to be read by someone, who will not sympathise with them."

My methodology was not too fancy and my program not too taxing.

All the students had to do was to write in their journals to get an easy A, plus extra points for more than the required number of pages: a grade of 103 is truly inspirational for a seventeen-year-old who-the-——-is-Shakespeare savant. As one of my more astute students said, "Journal writing is a way to get an easy grade"; and one of his classmates added, "It (journal writing) helped my grade stay half way decent."

Students could make journals out of anything bound: cloth-covered blank books; laminated spirals; blue, three-ring notebooks. Students could also illustrate their journals; write poetry, song lyrics, jokes; write about their unbelievably hard English teacher; yell—and it is, perhaps, in this yelling that most students found beneficial use for their journals. Journals helped students by allowing them to "get a few things off my mind," and to "yell, cry, and just talk in it and not have anyone yell back." One student said, "Being able to express my feelings and actions on paper has helped clear the way for my thinking." And another, "I love to write when I'm angry it helps me to get over it. When I'm sad it makes me feel better. To me journals are a lot of emotion writing and I enjoy it."

The benefits for the students beyond keeping their "already high grades high" included producing a memory book "to look back on and remember the things I did my senior year," as one student said. Still another student pointed out: "If my parents say this and that on such and such a date, I can prove them right or wrong." This is the same student who later said, "One day, when I become a writer (note: when, not if), I will have personal experiences written down that I can draw from." A budding S. E. Hinton or Joan Didion, perhaps. And then a much more practical student said, "It also helped me to remember what the date was." And a much more enigmatic student said, "I feel it helped me become more independent."

One year a group of my advanced-placement English students were sitting in the back of the room laughing, and more than usually curious about what was happening. I wandered toward them to see if I needed to exert my teacherly authority. One of the students handed me Tim's journal, opened to a satirical explication of "Jack and Jill" (the day before I tried to teach them how to explicate a poem). By spelling five words correctly, Tim transformed a piece of journal whimsy into a fourth-place winner in Scholastic Magazine's nation-wide creative writing contest.

I have to agree, on one level, with the student of mine who said, "I feel that you shouldn't be made to do one [keep a journal] if you don't want to." After all, I myself do not have the time or inclination to write in a journal. If, however, I do return to teaching, I will still subscribe to Dan Kirby's "Write Three or More Times a Week Club." And I still will not give in-class time for the writing of journals or list pithy sayings or provocative topics on the board for students to write about. I will still be a theoretically lousy journal writing teacher who is trying her best to get her students to write in their journals for real, nonpedagogically manufactured reasons. It was, after all, one of these real reasons

which had a deep impact upon both me and a large number of the students at the school where I taught.

The president of the student body, a star tennis player and a student in my English class, was run over by a car one evening as he and his friends were leaving a party. It was a hit-and-run accident. The day after the student's death, his father came to school to clean out his locker, and among the things he took home to look over was the student's journal.

In the journal, the father found a poem, written a few days before the accident. The family had the poem printed and distributed at the funeral. Hundreds of students attended the funeral and came away with something they understood—a fellow classmate's journal entry on death, ironically produced just a few days before.

That, if for no other reason, is why I would continue to require my students to write in their journals. It is my small attempt to find some way to make our fleeting existence somewhat more tangible; our emotions, more manageable; and our lives, more enjoyable.

Ada Hill formerly taught in Richmond and Chesterfield. She is currently a training coordinator at VEPCO.

The National Council of Teachers of English will consider usable ideas for a senior high edition of *Ideas for Teaching English*. Your idea must fit: oral language, writing, reading and literature, language study, thinking skills, or interdisciplinary studies on media; state the purpose of the activity, directions to both the teacher and the student; be no longer than *two pages*, doubled-spaced, typed; and be immediately useful to classroom teachers. Send to Bill Horst, 2311 Lighthouse Ct., Richmond, VA 23229 or Dianne Shaw, 164 Lake Ellen Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. Enclose a SASE for acknowledgement return of your idea and state your name and affiliation clearly.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 31, 1982.

The Gravity of Paragraphing

CLAUDE CLAYTON SMITH

In 1970, while at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop, I tutored in the Writing Lab, a place devoted to those students whose writing skills were so poor as to put them in danger of flunking out. We introduced these students to Miss Bunny (*Ms. Bunny* by today's standards, if in fact she is still alive and kicking out there in Iowa City), a mythical person in a model paragraph—a paragraph which served as a model paper as well.

The first sentence went something like this: *Miss Bunny, my high school English teacher, was not an effective disciplinarian.* It was marked with a Roman numeral I and labeled INTRODUCTION. *Miss Bunny* was identified as the subject, *my high school English teacher* was identified as the qualifying statement, and the predicate was identified as the attitude, fulfilling the three requirements for all good topic sentences.

There followed Roman numeral II, the BODY, consisting of three sentences (A, B, C) which expanded and supported the initial idea. (*Her squeaky voice, when she called for quiet, only produced more chaos, etc.*) Then came Roman numeral III, the CONCLUSION: *Miss Bunny could use a few lessons in controlling a class.* This fifth sentence was to summarize without being redundant.

And this five sentence paragraph could, in turn, become a five paragraph essay, with an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs in the body, and a concluding paragraph (one that summarized without being redundant).

With one student in particular it worked miracles. I remember his genuine surprise when I showed him the Miss Bunny ditto. It was as if he had been let in on a secret that, for some reason, had been kept from him throughout his previous schooling. He adhered to the model slavishly and his grades went from F's to B's. His history professor even called me up. "What did you do with this guy?" he demanded. "Introduced him to Miss Bunny," I replied.

That was the spring of Kent State and Cambodia, and the very building which housed the Writing Lab was burned to the ground (by accident or disgruntled students, it was never determined), but if Miss Bunny represented the educational Establishment, perhaps the burning was a very good thing, for my student's papers were stultifying and predictable, as rigid as they were clear, as boring as they were faultless in his reproduction of the model. Paragraphs do more than any model can indicate. The map, to use Korzybski, is not the territory.

In the seventies William F. Irmscher argued quite rightly for replacing the terms *Introduction*, *Body* and *Conclusion* with *Beginning*, *Middle* and *End*. The distinction is subtle but necessary, allowing for a more fluid concept of paragraphs and papers.

In *The Holt Guide To English* (2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), Irmscher offers a dozen ways to begin, a dozen ways to end, and shows how the design of the middle depends on the writer's purpose as well as the kind of paper he is writing. Form is a means of ordering, and on this point Irmscher quotes Kenneth Burke: "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence." Further, "the shaping of a paragraph may be best understood in terms of an ebb and flow of sentences between the general and the particular." It is this ebb and flow, or rather the metaphor that underlies it, that I wish to expand upon in suggesting a new way of looking at paragraphs—a way that leads easily to an effective classroom exercise.

In his article "Physics, The Most Important of the Liberal Arts," (*The Key Reporter*, Spring 1980), Richard Schlegel explains that physics provides

a foundation for a new way of seeing the universe... culture is based to a considerable extent on what the world is, that is, on the physical truths that we perceive in nature... the physical world places virtually absolute conditions on what we may believe or do.

If physical notions are appropriate to the liberal arts, then we ought to employ them in the teaching of writing. An idea springing from "absolute conditions" ought to be a workable one. And what is Burke's ebb and flow but an image borrowed from physics, the motion of the tides, caused by the moon's gravitational pull on the earth?

When I was in graduate school, I often ate dinner with a young man who was doing his Ph.D. in physics. I rarely understood any of his concerns, but I do recall vividly one thing he said. In trying to explain to me what he was working on, he used the analogy of pool balls, racked for the break with the 8 ball missing. He said he was studying the forces at work on the empty space created by the missing 8 ball. If I remember him correctly, the pool balls exert forces on that empty space, and that empty space, in turn, exerts a force on the surrounding pool balls. For the sake of simplicity, let us refer to these forces as *gravity*. "Gravity" is "a force that tends to draw all bodies in the earth's sphere toward the center of the earth." If the center of the earth is the main idea of a paragraph, then all bodies, or all of the other sentences, ought to tend in its direction.

Something *absent* (specific details, supporting evidence, etc.) can exert a force as much as something *present*. If the notion of gravity is applied to what we generally hold true about paragraphs, an interesting principle emerges: *the form and content of each and every sentence exerts a force on the sentences about it, even on the sentences to follow.* And what follows exerts a force on what has already been written, often creating a force for revision.

An idea that begins to express itself in parallel structure creates a force that demands that the parallel structure be carried out. A long sentence exerts pressure for a shorter sentence. A concluding sentence that is redundant is unnecessary because no force has been exerted to bring it forth. There is no hole, no missing 8 ball. These forces begin to build with the very first sentence, and this can easily be demonstrated in class:

Consider this paragraph from Schlegel's article:

We study liberal arts because we are trying to answer certain haunting fundamental questions. These queries are generally too large, almost too ineffable, to be much elucidated by direct reflection or investigation. And yet we hope that in our science and art and philosophy we may somehow come to terms with them and perhaps even gain some partial answers. I refer to such questions as, 'What is the extent of the universe?' 'What is the significance of living beings? of my life? of consciousness?' 'What can it mean if God exists? or does not exist?' ... such questions lie deep in our awareness and our work...

The first sentence above exerts a force *certain, haunting fundamental questions*, creating a hole filled by *These queries* in the second sentence and the list of questions at the end of the paragraph. In the second sentence *These queries* are creates a hole filled by *too large, almost too ineffable*, which in turn is balanced by the force of *And yet*, etc. The remaining sentences hold the subordinate clause of the first sentence in place *after* the independent clause instead of before it. Had the clauses of the first sentence been reversed, the force created would have changed the rest of the paragraph dramatically.

Further, the catalogue of queries at the end of the paragraph fills a hole created by *I refer to such questions as*, a phrase whose straightforward simplicity has been made necessary by the more complicated thoughts and sentence structures that precede it. And the final sentence in the paragraph exerts pressure on what is to follow, creating a hole for a specific example. These are just a few of the many forces set in motion by Schlegel's words, both by *what* is said and *how* it is said.

Following a close in-class look at a model paragraph such as this one, students can turn to their own paragraphs, to test them for gravity. The questions are simple: What holes are created by your words and sentences? How are these holes filled?

Burke's notion of anticipation and gratification is at work here, but it is illustrated more concretely, perhaps, by the physical concept of gravity. When all forces tend toward the main idea and the demands of the minor forces are met, the gravity of the paragraph is in order. No words or ideas will float weightlessly away, or what's worse, create vectors that are unresolvable.

I realize now that I have slipped into another metaphor, the resolution of forces by vector analysis, but it is just as appropriate as the metaphor of gravity. The point is that each and every word, and arrangement of words, creates a force, and the more that students are asked to delineate the forces at work in their own paragraphs as well as the paragraphs of others, the more they will be made aware of the literal, physical power of words. Only then, perhaps, (in spite of Miss Bunny) will they begin to accept responsibility for what they often so carelessly put down on the page.

Claude Smith is an assistant professor of English at Virginia Tech.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The winter 1983 issue of *Virginia English Bulletin* will include manuscripts on "Computers in English Classes." Authors are encouraged to submit manuscripts, not to exceed 5-8 pages, which address the importance of computer literacy, how computers may aid the English/language arts teacher, capitalizing on student interest in computers, comparisons of the microcomputer with the interactive computer, developing computer programs for English classes. The manuscripts should be written to an audience knowing little about computers, but desiring information and understanding. Manuscripts which move beyond skill development will be appreciated; it is permissible, however, to address development of student language arts skills.

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 1, 1983

Teaching Research Skills Without Needless Repetition

MARLEEN BARR

The arrival of winter term to our campus brings the expected grey bleakness as well as manmade gloom. Freshmen—and faculty—dread the season of the composition research requirement. Students hate to write research papers; faculty hate to grade them. Although my department no longer demands that students write long research papers, it still insists that we stress research. I vowed to use this new freedom to make the composition research experience more pleasant for myself and students.

I want students to leave the class knowing how to narrow a topic, how to write and interpret footnotes, how to locate reference material, and how to articulate the results of their research. I have successfully accomplished these objectives by asking them to write a three-page paper in lieu of the usual hippopotamic variety.

When told that I require three pages, students initially become anxious. After all, they have spent the first months of freshman year listening to horror stories about the ordeal they will face during winter term. Their apprehension soon gives way to relief, however. And some students even become enthusiastic after I ask them to choose a topic that interests them. Armed with a classroom lesson on footnote/bibliography form, a visit from a librarian, a completed library research exercise and the knowledge that their papers must contain at least two documented sources, each student comes to my office for a required discussion about how to properly narrow topics.

Because I enjoy learning during these conferences—students know more about nuclear power plants, sharks, road construction, and the like than I do—I also require them to communicate the results of their research by giving a five-minute oral presentation. They derive a sense of self-worth and useful public speaking practice from sharing their expertise on subjects they truly enjoy.

My method retards the plagiarism problem. During our conferences, I ask students why they chose their particular topic and I delve into their responses. After a fruitful discussion, I feel relatively certain that the student will proceed to write the paper. I have enough faith in my students to trust that they will not spend five minutes lying to my face. Or, individuals who may be tempted to cheat when personal contact is not involved are dissuaded from doing so by the conference situation. Intangible elements—those who deliver their oral reports with gleams in their eyes or enthusiastic lilt in their voices, those who speak beyond the required time because of their bubbling interest—reassure me that I am receiving original work. Research paper mills do not sell three-page papers.

I hear a disgruntled voice. How thorough are three-page research

papers? Do writers of short papers learn research skills adequately? My answer: If someone can successfully locate and document one scholarly book and one scholarly journal article, nothing is gained by insisting upon repetition. Anyone who can find two sources has the ability to locate innumerable sources. Anyone who can write two correct footnotes can look forward to a future of proper footnote formation. My students master the skills I teach even though they are spared from deadening repetitive activities. Once free of the long anticipated dread of writing research papers, most of my freshman are open to enjoying the process of gathering and disseminating information.

Positive attitudes toward research should also be encouraged in high school classes. Because it is far less intimidating than the traditional long paper, the abbreviated research exercise is ideally suited to students' initial research experience. First time researchers will not feel overwhelmed by their assignment; they will approach their new task with more confidence and less trepidation. The short paper frees teachers to spend time assisting individual beginners with their task's most problematical aspect, isolating an appropriate topic. And, like freshmen, high school students would derive confidence from informing their peers about subjects which specifically interest them. Most importantly, however, high school teachers present students with their first—and lasting—impressions of the research process. If high school students view their preliminary exposure to research with enthusiasm instead of dread, their teachers have successfully communicated the foundation for a lifelong interest in acquiring new knowledge.

I will close with the voices of three anonymous responses my students offered after hearing this essay:

Student One:

A shorter paper accomplishes the same goals as the traditional long paper without the usual doom and gloom atmosphere. For once in my life, I am looking forward to writing a term paper! I wish my high school English teacher could hear me say that!

Student Two:

Bravo! After hearing horror stories all first quarter about long term papers on boring topics, I am actually looking forward to writing a brief paper on a topic of my choice. I rarely look forward to writing any kind of paper, but this is an exception. Because I picked a topic which I was interested in but knew little about, the many hours I spend researching will be pleasant ones. I feel that my enthusiasm will help me produce a better paper.

Student Three:

It may seem that a student cannot learn a lot about research from a three-page paper. But this is not so. In my research so far I have had to locate ten books because so many turned out to be inappropriate. I have learned many new things about my topic from reading through my sources. Even though I won't put all the sources in the paper, the fact remains that I became more knowledgeable.

Each of the fifty comments I received reiterated these positive attitudes. (Editor's Note: Barr included several other informative responses which, because of space requirements, had to be eliminated.)

Marleen Barr is an assistant professor of English at Virginia Tech.

The Academic Journal

WARREN P. SELF

The academic journal provides students with such a rich opportunity for learning that it is difficult for them not to learn. It increases the amount of writing they do without significantly adding to the amount of time teachers must spend evaluating, or responding to, student writing. And reading students' academic journals provides teachers with a way to understand what their students are learning, which assignments have frustrated them, what they need pedagogically, and whether instruction has been effective.

The academic journal increases students' opportunities to engage in expressive writing. Journals provide students with a place to think and to record their thoughts. As they read, hear lectures, participate in class discussions, and see dramatic productions, they have thoughts and reactions, but frequently those thoughts and reactions get displaced, and they are seldom recorded. Often they do not even get fully formed; before one thought or insight can be fully developed, a new one can crowd it out of a student's attention.

Our students are no different in that respect from us. We all have thoughts as we encounter new experiences, information, and concepts. Yet these thoughts frequently get a little conscious attention. If we give students the opportunity to express in academic journals some of their thoughts about the content of our courses before those thoughts get displaced, we can increase the chances of their thinking being fully developed. Writing about their hunches, ideas, and insights—students can become surer about what they do think.

Journal entries can be written as part of class time, as homework assignments, or both. We can pose questions or topics for the journal entries, or we can depend on the students' generating their own topics for the journal entries. We can direct that the journal entries be in response to class discussions or to reading assignments as the particular needs of the students and the goals of our instruction suggest. Journals are very flexible in their application.

Let me explain how I employ, review, and evaluate students' journals to help them learn more about literature. I require my students to write at least one full page of thoughtful response to each reading assignment they have during the term. Writing their entries prior to attending class, they can react to the literature however they want: they can express opinions about it, offer explanations of its meaning, ask and try to answer their own questions about it, express their emotional responses to it, and compare or contrast new reading assignments with previous ones. I stress only that they seriously attempt to record their experiences as readers.

At least once during the ten-week term, I review each student's journal. Usually, I schedule this review during the third or fourth week, taking

twenty or so journals at a time. I read the entries carefully, determine whether all the entries have been written, and write responses that take the forms of questions about what they have written, comments praising them for some insightful observation, or brief answers to questions they have posed. Occasionally those exchanges lead to a fuller dialogue with a student, and frequently I gain some valuable insights into what my students have learned and what they are thinking. About correctness and stylistic matters, I am generally silent, as I do not want to intensify their concerns about such matters and displace thinking.

At the end of the term, I collect the journals a second time, read the entries added since I last reviewed the journal, determine whether all the required entries have been written, and make brief comments. I also write a closing remark, usually thanking the students for taking the journal requirement seriously and praising them for thinking about the literature.

In terms of evaluation, the journal can earn 15 to 20 points out of 100. If the student has a complete journal and if the entries are generally serious efforts to react to and think about the reading assignments, I award the full number of points possible, rewarding students for the thinking they do in their journals. The total amount of time that I spend with each student's journal during a grading term is about an hour; they, however, spend considerably more time writing and thinking.

Very often the thinking they do in their journals enriches our class discussions of the literature. They come to class with ideas and reactions and frequently will share them as we talk about the reading assignment. They also are continuously building a rich resource of ideas and insights enabling them to write more meaningfully and purposefully on tests and exams. When they re-read their journals as part of the preparation for tests, they have their thinking renewed and refreshed, recapturing thoughts they may have initially had several weeks earlier and connecting those thoughts to new or more recent ones.

Frequently, students will use material written in their journals when they are preparing transactional papers for the course. For example, Nicole, a freshman in an American literature survey course, used her journal entries about the poetry of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and Ezra Pound to learn why she preferred Frost's poetry. She knew that she liked his poetry the best, but she did not know why. In her journal entries on these poets, she contrasted their poetry and learned why. In a brief note to me, Nicole recounted how her journal entries helped her write the paper.

On March 12, 1982, I wrote in my journal about the assigned poems by Robert Frost. In this entry I described why I enjoyed Frost's writing so that later when I went to write my formal paper on Frost, I referred back to what I had written in the journal entry. Since the entry had many of my ideas written down and organized for me—writing the paper was much easier and many times I was able to take lines and phrases directly from the entry.

In another entry on March 19 [on Ezra Pound's poetry], I re-

called some thoughts on why I liked Frost in comparison to other writers. This gave me a second opportunity to clarify in my mind what I wanted to say in the formal paper—and even though I only wrote a few lines in my journal entry, I actually thought quite a bit about why I enjoyed Frost because I realized how little I like some other writer's poetry.

The paper that Nicole wrote was a product of the thinking she did over a period of two to three weeks in her journal. Her assignment was to write a paper of about two typed pages in which she expressed a thoughtful reaction to the poetry of Robert Frost, choosing whichever of his poems she wanted to discuss. The paper was not to be a research essay, nor was it to be a student's attempt to write in the manner of a skilled literary scholar. It was, however, to be addressed to an audience other than the writer, and it was to achieve some purpose with that audience. Nicole's paper successfully met the requirements of the assignment, providing her with an opportunity to continue a learning process begun in her journal.

Nicole and other students in my classes use the academic journal to make meaning from their encounters with literature and ideas. The journal provides them with the occasion for discussing with themselves what they think and feel, and they often formulate ideas, develop opinions, create insights, and make connections. Without the journal, many of my students would not make that kind of learning occur. Without the journal, Nicole may never have understood why she preferred the poetry of Robert Frost to that of Ezra Pound.

Warren Self is associate professor of English at Radford University and the outgoing editor of The Needle's Eye.

The Practical Book Report

RANDEANE TETU

In Advanced English, Miss Derrick came up with a list of activities she called ALTERNATIVES TO BOOK REPORTS. So Dee wrote an essay, titled *Save the Book Report*, that went like this—

We are teaching something meaningful with book reports. We are teaching students to be devious and to polish up their deviosity by making it good enough to be accepted by the English teacher. This deviosity, begun early and practiced throughout the high school years, is fundamental for students enrolled in the College Course as it develops the expertise needed for throwing the bull on essay exams in all subjects. Of all the requirements listed, book reports are the single most effective and efficient preparation for college.

Although the professed reason for book reports is to get students to read books (and thereby expand their horizons), everyone knows that the ones who read books do reports on the books they've already read, and the ones who don't read books do reports on the books they haven't read. Those who read get the chance to practice essay writing on something they know (these are most likely the same ones who will read assignments in college); those who don't, get the chance to construct essays based on the little information available from the paperback cover or gleaned from someone who's read the book (these are most likely the ones who will not read assignments). In either case, with written book reports, students get practice and feedback in a basic survival skill—convincing someone else that they do know what they either do or do not actually know.

Because some of the students who do read books for book reports may not read all assignments in college, I suggest assigning book reports to be written on books the student has not read. This, I feel, would raise the state of the art to its most meaningful level.

—I think she could have convinced Miss Derrick, who felt the power of the written word, had she stopped right there, but she told Miss Derrick that she didn't know what to do about the student who would cheat and read the book. That canned it.

Randeane Tetu is a resident of Haddam, CT, and teaches at Middlesex Community College.

Writing in Response to Counseling Activities

PATRICK BIZZARO and STUART WERNER

Writing is not only an intellectual activity, it is an emotional one carried on in an emotional environment. Beginning, or basic, writers fear making errors, and their fear creates barriers not only to writing but also to having something to write about. There is no quick remedy. But student fear may be somewhat allayed and the students may be encouraged to write if the teacher uses counseling techniques to generate writing assignments.

There are some guidelines for making an effective writing assignment. Teachers should unambiguously identify the purpose and audience; create a real and meaningful context for student writing. Ample time should be set aside to encourage and guide the student-writer through revision. Ideas should be evaluated, patterns of development discovered, and the process of composing traced and retraced by the writer.

But there is an equally basic fact about assignments: Not all writing assignments are suited to beginning writers who, because they lack skill and confidence, begin each assignment with the belief they cannot successfully complete it. If it is true that the affective usually controls the cognitive, then a good assignment for a basic writer is one that begins with the affective.

Besides identifying audience, purpose and the need for careful revision, an assignment for a basic writer should be in response to both the classroom as an emotional environment and the student as a fearful writer. It should involve the student in writing about an immediate experience shared with classmates. And it should be risk-free, making certain no prior knowledge is required of the student beyond personal memory.

We discovered that an assignment based on an in-class counseling activity is well suited to the beginning writer for it helps the students confront their fears about writing and supplies a context within which meaningful writing can occur. We have had students write in response to activities concerning goal setting, value clarification, and personal strength assessment. But beginning writers, early in the term, seem to benefit most by dealing with their roles in groups.

Our initial goal is to help students feel comfortable about working in groups. We base an exercise on group consensus and then ask students to write in response to it. Group consensus involves students achieving an agreeable solution to a problem. The group must reach agreement without the use of intimidation, majority-rule, or coercion. As a result, no group can solve a problem without consulting each of its members. Each student, even the most silent, has the opportunity to be heard by and to influence others.

An exercise which we have used successfully at the start of the term is the NASA Exercise (developed originally by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration program). Students are placed in groups of

four, handed an Individual Worksheet and a Group Worksheet and told they are members of a space crew stranded on the moon. Below the instructions are fifteen items, ranging from a box of matches to a solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter, which must be rank ordered, beginning with the most important survival item. The students are given five minutes to individually rank-order the items. Then they are given instructions for working in their groups.

They are told to avoid arguing for their own individual judgments. Because the students have never been stranded on the moon, there are no real authorities in any group. They are then asked to avoid changing their minds if the only reason for doing so is to reach agreement and avoid conflict; they should support only those solutions to the problem with which they agree. Finally, they are asked to pay particular attention to the difference between arguing from opinion and arguing from fact.

We monitor the group exchanges, making certain no member dominates and no members are ignored. We occasionally intercede in a discussion to ask a vocal member to give the floor to someone else or invite a quiet member to indicate whether he or she agrees with what is being said. After twenty minutes, which seems an adequate amount of time, the students must have reached consensus or resigned themselves to failure to resolve their differences. In either event, the group process is more vital to this exercise than consensus.

Each group is then asked what rank order it has decided upon. We then ask, "How did you decide upon this order?" "What was your role in the group?" "Who was the leader of the group?" "How did he (or she) become the leader?" "Was anyone able to sell the group on the entirety of his or her original rank order?"

This activity accomplishes several goals. First, students have an experience which is simultaneously shared and idiosyncratic. While they must work with each other, each is involved to differing degrees. Second, they have the opportunity to voice an opinion or state a fact and participate in the group, even if their response is limited to a nod of agreement. Third, they can be shown the subtle differences between fact and opinion and discuss their concerns about working in a group situation. Finally, they are able to contemplate their involvement in the group process.

An emotional environment has been created within which we are able to generate any of a variety of potent writing assignments. One very useful assignment asks students to write about how they perceive themselves in the group, what they believe their roles were. A second assignment asks them to write in response to this situation: You are at a party with a friend, but do not know anyone there. How will you react to the situation? A third topic asks that the students respond to the question, "What strategies do you use to survive through the day?"

The teacher can later request that students select the assigned writing they want to share with their group and work further on that writing

assignment. The idea is to let students discover something that they feel comfortable writing about to their peers.

Writing in response to a counseling activity such as the NASA Exercise permits students the unusual luxury of writing about their fears and discovering that they are not isolated in their feelings. They come to know their classmates and see them as a viable audience for their writings. They may also come to see the classroom as a safe and risk-free environment and writing as something that grows naturally from their own introspection as well as from a classroom activity or assignment.

Patrick Bizzaro and Stuart Werner teach at Northern Virginia Community College, Manassas. They are indebted to the Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education for grant support during the time the article was written.

HUMOR-AND-METAPHOR CONFERENCE

Held at the Phoenix Hilton Hotel from March 31 to April 2, 1983, the theme of the conference is "Far-fetched Metaphors: The Humor of Linguistic Deviance." Sponsored by Western Humor and Irony Membership (WHIM). Proposals on any aspect of humorous metaphor should be submitted by January 1, 1983 to Don L. F. Nilsen; ASU; TEMPE, AZ 85287.

Recycle Literature With the Scrapbook Journal

GLEN SMITH

Old literature texts usually end up in the dark recesses of a closet or an English department storeroom. This is unfortunate because these books can provide a useful source for an occasional unit. I enjoy choosing selections from them according to the likes and needs of my classes.

While working with a set of these auxiliary texts, I thought of using the scrapbook journal. Like many teachers, I usually prefer that my classes on the same grade level, with students who have similar abilities, work concurrently on the same unit. But the set of books contained a few more copies than the number of students in my largest class. Thus to keep the groups together I needed a good in-class assignment; I also wanted a teaching method that would allow for considerable student creativity. Both objectives, I thought, could be achieved with the scrapbook journal. Students needed a reading level sufficient to handle the stories that were used, and the ability to analyze short stories in terms of plot, theme, or characterization. The format should be adaptable to many senior high English classes as well as to some junior high groups.

I began the unit well into the year and thus had a good idea of the type stories that would appeal to most of my students. With artistic quality and student tastes as criteria, I chose eight stories of varied lengths from an old literature text. Next, I placed the three selections which seemed the most compelling and significant at the head of a stenciled list. Along with the list I recorded detailed requirements for writing the journal.

Upon handing out the list and requirements, I stressed that the textbooks would be used only in class. Students absent while the unit was in progress would be allowed to check out one of the extra text copies in order to make up lost class time. Then I discussed carefully the actual writing requirements:

- everyone must write entries for the first three stories;
- each entry has to contain a comment on either the plot, theme, or characterization;
- additional comments can be of any type, interpretative or otherwise; to pass the unit four selections must have complete entries;
- after the first three stories are read and commented on, the remaining stories can be done in any order, with literary analysis required in each instance;
- entries have to *average* one handwritten page or more, though some comments may be quite brief and others more extensive.

I also stressed that an important part of the assignment was the recording of the journalists' personal feelings about the selections. Examples here included student experiences comparable to those of the

characters, or how the students reacted to the thoughts and actions of the characters. Some overlap of interpretative and personal comments was permissible. I stressed that once the minimum literary analysis was done, further comments could relate to any other facet(s) of the story that the journalist found interesting.

Finally, in order to encourage diversity and creativity, I urged the classes to decorate their journals, thus making scrapbooks. Magazine or newspaper clippings, original or quoted poetry, and original artwork were all suggested.

The results of the assignment were encouraging. Classes worked for approximately one week and there were no discipline problems. Most students worked willingly for the entire period each day. A discussion session allowed everyone a chance to comment on or ask questions about any of the selections. Naturally, those stories required of all students received the most thorough treatment.

When I evaluated the journals, I found that they were generally neat and seemed to reflect pride on the part of the writers. Many entries contained both perceptive comments and thoughtful questions. Some journalists did include too much summary and too little literary analysis and personal reaction. On the whole, however, students and I were pleased with this departure from our usual format.

Glen Smith is a teacher at Jefferson Forest High School in Forest.

NCTE Southeastern Regional Conference

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Ideas About Subjects: Getting Something to Write About

RICHARD J. MURPHY, JR.

With support from the Writing Research Center of George Mason University, Warren Self and I conducted a Fall 1981 classroom-based investigation of the process of invention. Before doing the research, we had regularly assigned for several reasons, our students subjects on which to write essays. First, though they regularly objected that our limited lists of topics were too narrow, on the rare occasions when we had given them broad choice they had objected that they couldn't find anything to write about. Second, we felt vaguely guilty if we didn't tell them what to write about; we were sure they wouldn't write "seriously" and we wouldn't be doing sufficient work. Third, we thought of the subject as only incidental to the composition. We assumed that the selection of subject was simply preliminary to the real "work" of writing, the fashioning of a thesis about it.

Our research made us challenge this assumption. It is possible to construct a thesis statement about a subject that is utterly neutral, utterly meaningless for us. We all have done it; we still write about subjects that are set for us, not chosen by us. Nevertheless, if we have the choice, if we can choose our subject, the natural process is to choose precisely that subject for which we already have, at least intuitively, a thesis, an idea; that subject which is meaningful for us.

As apparently obvious as this notion is, it has some radical implications for our understanding of the cognitive process of invention and a clear consequence for our teaching practice. When we teach our students about thesis statements by distinguishing them from subjects, we are making a literal and important distinction: the subject is the thing we are writing about; the thesis statement is the idea we are articulating about it. It is a distinction which occurs in practice, however, only artificially. Only when a boss, editor, or teacher assigns us a subject of her choosing, do we separate these two tasks in our writing: selecting a subject, which has already been done for us; and selecting a thesis about it, which we are left to do ourselves. Otherwise, the distinction practically evaporates. We don't choose subjects about which we have nothing to say. We choose them because we have something to say, however obscure that may be to us at the moment. It is this something that makes the subject significant to us and the labor of saying it promising.

In the case study, we observed student writing which suggests such a distinction. Kevin, an experienced elementary teacher, was assigned a position paper about teaching writing. Before he had even settled on a subject, he interviewed other teachers in his school. The responses were so disheartening that his attention shifted instantly to his audience: who were they? how could he address them? what could he say to persuade them of his conviction? He knew from the start what he thought about teaching writing to the children in his classroom. He knew that it was enormously valuable, both for his students and for himself. Yet he wrote around and around this thought, trying to say what he meant, dodging what felt to him like a hostile audience, alternately stumbling and pontificating, frustrating himself and muddling his paper. Through three drafts, he was sure of neither his subject nor his audience. In one sense, we could say that he didn't really know what he wanted to say either. When he had finally expressed his idea to his own satisfaction, he hadn't said anything new; he hadn't discovered a new thing he thought about teaching writing in elementary school. Rather he had managed merely to articulate what he thought all along.

Another student, Christine, knew from day one that she was writing about her kitchen: the grease and dust under the stove hood, the piles of stuff

precariouly arranged on cramped counters. But as soon as she had begun to portray it so, she was expressing her idea as well: that it was a mess, like her life, and that she somehow felt guilty about it. She wrote through multiple drafts about her morning schedule: running with her husband and children from one errand to another, her neighbor who always demanded that she stop and talk, her tidy meticulous friend from England whose every visit meant "cleaning" the kitchen into brown paper shopping bags stacked temporarily in the attic. This description was so rich, however, because it conveyed what she felt from the start—that yes, she felt guilty, sometimes, in front of her neighbor or in front of her friend, but also proud. Her kitchen was a mess because she wanted it that way. It was a sign to her of a vitality she felt, of hectic creativity, of a life that she prized.

When we choose a subject to write about, we do so because we already know, or feel we have, something to say about it. One practical consequence of such a view is clear. If we assign our students subjects, instead of requiring that they find their own, we are both constricting and freeing them. In the first place, we are limiting them necessarily to a range of neutral subjects, subjects which have, at least at the start, no meaning for them. Instead, we have defined the task for them as a process of trying to construct meaning for subjects that seem meaningful *to us*. If they are unable to do so, or if they are able to do so only inadequately, their failure may be due simply to the natural limits of the list we have provided.

Secondly, giving them assigned lists of subjects from which to choose also frees them from a considerable intellectual burden. In order to find a subject for themselves, they need to genuinely consider both what they think and what they want to say. In order to write about a given subject, however, they needn't be committed at all. When we assign them subjects, therefore, we officially shrink the range of possibilities for them and thereby permit them to settle for what many students explicitly say they prefer, whether it interests them or not. "Give us something to write about," they ask, recognizing as they do that to get the "something" themselves requires of them, immediately, extraordinary thought and commitment.

Rich Murphy teaches at Radford University and is on VATE's Executive Board.

NEW VIRGINIA REVIEW

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Book Reviews

Van Til, William. *Writing for Professional Publication*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Boston, 1981. 332 pp.

Judy, Stephen N. (Editor). *Publishing in English Education*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, Montclair, 1982. 189 pp.

Reviewed by Daisy Reed

If you have been thinking about writing for publication, don't start until you have read one or both of these informative and readable "how-to" books. Your choice will depend on the subject about which you are writing. I suggest you start with Van Til's book which speaks to a general professional audience. If you are specifically interested in the English language arts areas, you should then proceed to read Judy's book.

Van Til employs a relaxed, informal, and personalized style. He uses dialogues between himself and inexperienced writers to ask and answer questions about publishing. Part 1, "Publishing Opportunities," includes, among others, chapters about publishing a book, writing for professional magazines, publishing in scholarly journals, reviewing books, writing columns, and writing textbooks, trade books and specialized books. Part 2, "The Writer at Work," includes chapters about finding time to write, getting ideas, using the writer's tools, developing a style, finding a publisher, developing a manuscript. Part 3, "In the Editorial Offices," includes chapters about the role of the editor, the production process, and marketing. Part 4, "How About—?" includes a miscellany of questions and answers derived from participants in writing workshops.

Before writing this review, I read the chapter on "Book Reviewing." The dialogue told the benefits of book reviewing, how best to describe the book, the varying lengths of reviews, using personal opinion and/or objectivity, and some practical tips. The supplement in the chapter provided a book review style sheet, and six sample letters on book review procedures.

A widely-published author of school and college English texts, Judy edited *Publishing in English Education* and contributed one chapter. Twelve other well-known English Educators contributed chapters which reflect an "insiders" point-of-view on publishing.

The chapter on elementary language arts, written by Julie M. Jensen, includes information about choosing a journal, the audience, finding time to write, submitting the manuscript, and resources for writers. The chapter on college English, written by Richard C. Gebhardt, discusses subjects for writing which bring theory and practice together; choosing a writing style that is "imaginative, personal, evocative"; and developing useful work habits.

Because the chapters are written by different authors, they present different kinds of information. Some of the information is overlapping, but most of it is unique to a particular author. A reading of the entire book gives more facts and suggestions and a broader base of knowledge about publishing.

Both Van Til and Judy have provided professionals with a wealth of information, facts, and insights for getting into print. The books are worth the reading time.

Daisy Reed is an assistant professor in teacher education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Great English Teaching Ideas: Waiting for the Perfect Assignment

Edited by BETH BOONE

Several months ago I figured putting this column together would be easy. After all, teachers have been making effective assignments and coping with reduced budgets for years. This time, surely, the ideas would come begging. Every English teacher I know saves throw-aways. I once managed to get twenty-seven students hooked on six copies of *The Grapes of Wrath*. I see lots of teachers hounding grocery and department stores, fair exhibits, professional conferences, and publishing companies for free books and instructional aids, and we all bind, glue, tape, and reuse our textbooks. We're so adept at coping that we're shocked when presented with plenty. A teaching friend who recently moved to Alaska filled six pages of a letter with tales of her new school system that encourages students to write IN INK in consumable materials. Despite this wealth of experience, my mailbox did not fill up with budget or effective assignment ideas. Could it be that we're so busy coping we don't have time to write about it?

Teachers know—instinctively, I think—that effective assignments are chameleons. And that makes them almost impossible to share. Our students tell us when an assignment is lousy; they don't do it, or they do an incredibly sloppy job of it. With a bit of thoughtful digging and shovelling, we can usually uncover the reasons for its ineffectiveness. It is not easy, though, to know why an assignment works well, or why the assignment that turned thirty thirteen-year-old rowdies into scholars bombed out with twenty-two of their equally lively counterparts two class periods later.

The more I thought about it the more I realized that if the same assignments worked well for most teachers and most students, we could all sit down one day, maybe at a VATE conference, write up a bunch, and circulate them throughout the state along with the Standards of Learning. Obviously, the idea is ludicrous.

I called several teachers and posed this question: What makes an assignment effective? My hunch was that every teacher travelled with a theory of effective assignment making; if I put those pieces together, we could have a real philosophy for effective assignments. I think my hunch was right. The individual responses that follow differ. *Teachers must focus on the students and the skills they are teaching at the time.* Collectively, though, their responses form, for me, the whole elephant. Some resemble snakes; others feel like walls; some are sturdy as tree trunks, but each girds the making of effective assignments.

★ ★ ★ ★

● **Effective Assignments Encourage Students to Assume Responsibility for Their Own Learning**

If assignments are to be effective, students must assume responsibility for their own learning. They should, at times, design their own assignments. Journal writing can work particularly well because the journal assignment itself indicates the importance of student ideas. When a journal entry becomes the basis for more formal writing or research, the students have designed their own assignments. They have much at stake, and they do well. Not long ago, for example, I read an excellent composition on "General Hospital." The paper was outstanding, not because the student had written a five-paragraph theme on the importance of soap operas, but because she creatively used the events in her rec room that occurred from 2:55 to 3:00 one afternoon before the program began, events originally recorded in a journal.

Of course, there is a corollary to this theory. Teachers' roles change; we no longer have supreme authority: the students' ideas are most important; their writing is theirs, not ours complicated by some essay formula. We must expect to read and hear what we feel is trite or lacking in depth. This becomes easier when we remember that it is the mental not the physical journey that makes for real learning. No idea is too trite, or too unimportant.

DELLA ANDERSON, VCU

★ ★ ★ ★

● **Effective Assignments are Linked to a Student's Ability and His Level of Cognitive Development**

Assignments must be geared to our students' ability levels. Bloom and his taxonomy are as important now that we're in a classroom as they were when we enrolled in college learning theory classes. The taxonomy helps me see where my students are and where I want them to go. My assignments must start where my students can produce comfortably. I teach in a school for learning disabled students; thus, I usually begin with students who have very basic skills and cognitive abilities. My initial assignments ask them to manipulate information: they can list examples, answer in phrases or basic sentence patterns, and complete charts or diagrams. In time, these students can work with assignments that ask them to comprehend material and ideas. They can compare one story with another or solve the problems that require them to understand "how" and "why." When their progress indicates a need for new challenges, the assignments must move from simple recall and understanding to independent thinking and analysis. Now, they can analyze quotes or symbols or stories; they can apply what is learned in one situation to another. Finally, at the highest levels of cognitive development, they can integrate ideas from the sources we use in school with their own thoughts and feelings. If we supply students with assignments appropriate for the students' skill level, students will be motivated and challenged. And they'll grow from one level to the next!

KATHLEEN WELSCH, New Community School, Richmond

★ ★ ★ ★

● **Effective Assignments Happen Spontaneously When Teachers are Perceptive and Willing to Take Risks**

One September Monday after a weekend out of town I decided not to teach the lesson I'd planned. Instead I mentioned to my class that I'd seen the movie

Ragtime over the weekend, and that I'd been surprised to find it very different from what a newspaper review had led me to expect. Had anyone seen it?

Fifty minutes later, the bell ended a spirited discussion on the merits of the movie, the responsibilities of movie reviewers, the qualities which mark excellence in film, the changing roles of black actors and actresses, the morality of the Academy Awards, and the nature of the American movie-going public. As a result of this discussion some students planned to bring movie reviews from newspapers and magazines to guide the class in writing their own reviews for the school paper; others planned to write letters to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; a third group was planning a panel discussion entitled "The Decline and Fall of the American Motion Picture."

When something good starts happening in class, a perceptive teacher postpones the day's lesson to pursue it. Why don't we follow our instincts more often? Every September we face the culprits anew: objectives from the state, system-wide objectives, administrative objectives, departmental objectives, and self-inflicted individual objectives. Sure, we can carefully devise lessons that will enable students to attain a multiplicity of goals, but eventually the zeal of teachers and students wanes. It's then that the "out of the blue, take the risk" lessons are best!

BETH WENTWORTH, J-H-W H.S. Complex, Richmond



● Effective Assignments Spark Interest and Stimulate Thinking

Here is a parable to ponder: A young man strolls by an extended colonnade. Its many arches are filled with light; a strong breeze flows throughout. Passing each archway, he stops and stares, wondering at his own thoughts and the newness of the sights each archway presents.

The colonnade is the array of assignments we must provide our students. Since the first step toward learning is interest, the well designed assignment must personally involve the student. Recently my students read two essays about poverty. Because they weren't familiar with the poverty described, I needed assignments that would force students to think about and feel this new experience. One of the four choices began "You are poor. You write in a diary every night with a pencil you found on the street. You write on paper bags you have collected from trash cans . . . use some of what we have read as an idea of what to write, and draw from your personal experience." Another option asked students to assume the persona of a "social worker who has worked in the projects for a year." A third called for a letter to Senator Warner in support of increased aid to the poor. Choice four follows:

You are starving. You have been looking for a job everyday for the past nine months. No luck. Tomorrow the rent is due. Your baby's stomach is starting to swell. You have no food. You leave your apartment and wander. You find yourself standing in an empty grocery with only one attendant and. . . . You tell the story from the grocer's perspective. . . . He is well-off, rather fat from over-indulgence and very suspect of the poor.

This range of assignments worked because it was comfortably full of outlets, allowing each student to experiment with new thoughts and interact with the literature. The interest and excitement at the next class meeting was spontaneous, the discussion lively, and the possibility for learning heightened.

Assignments like these mean work for the teacher, but our students need assignments that offer them a choice and the opportunity to synthesize what they already know with what they are learning.

CHARLIE KOUNS, Open High School, Richmond

★ ★ ★ ★

● **Effective Assignments Connect the Pieces of Our Discipline With Each Other and With Other Disciplines**

I hadn't had to deal with students who were suspicious of my methods before. The class of academically gifted students told me they were accustomed to monologues from previous teachers—monologues interspersed with assignments: vocabulary, one day; literature, another; grammar, the next. Not only were the components of the discipline we collectively label English separated; they were separated from the other disciplines taught in our school as well. When I gave my students a writing assignment on Whitman which not only offered three choices, each with a different audience, purpose, and mode, but also required that they read, think, discuss, evaluate, and relate English to the lessons taught in history and government classes, the gifted became paralyzed. The departures from tradition I had gained in a summer writing project quickly lost their appeal. Eventually, what I'd envisioned as writing groups became part-time discussion groups where connections happen naturally. In these groups, literature and history found a place to meet and my students began to relax. Freewriting helped, too. The bewilderment and suspicion dissipated, and additional reading, improved grammar, and more precise vocabulary followed naturally when my students wanted to share writing as well as ideas.

ROBERT PRUETT, Richmond Community High School, Richmond

★ ★ ★ ★

● **Assignments May Be Effective Even When We Think They Are Not**

One day not long ago, I slumped by a desk watching my student writing groups and wondering where I had failed. After several discussions and a modeling session, my students continued to say "Uh-huh," "Okay," and "I like it fine," after each student reading. Why couldn't they understand that the sole purpose of my writing groups was to offer critical comment?

Glancing around the room, I saw Kenny, a star athlete, reading to his group. They were spellbound as they listened to Kenny's first entire page of writing. Entitled "Grandpa," the writing spoke of Kenny's feelings of loss and abandonment when Grandpa died. As I watched Kenny and his group, I was truly moved by the openly shared feelings of these teen-aged boys. More than one tear was shed during the hour.

The significance, however, of what I saw lies in what I discovered about myself and my objectives. Here was a student who never cared about his writing when it was merely to be handed to me, but who had made an effort to share a personal experience with his peers. In turn, those peers reacted honestly both to the experience and to the writing. My own narrow perception of purpose nearly made me miss their accomplishment. I wonder now how many times my assignment may well have been effective, but my evaluation of its outcome was not.

LAURA LEMING, Goochland High School, Goochland

★ ★ ★ ★

● What Do Students Want In An Assignment?

I asked some students at Richmond's Open High School what kind of assignments they liked best. Many hinted at the need to assume responsibility for their own learning. One student wrote, "I want an assignment that I can really make my own. I don't think a good assignment tells me when to begin and when to end. It gives me a choice." "In my best class," said another, "assignments are planned so that we all can work on our own level. . . . In this class I work harder, but I don't really feel as if I'm working." Others indicated the need to take risks in order to grow. For one student, growth was synonymous with personal development: "I enjoy assignments that force me to look at myself, to see what is real and what is hypocritical." For another, growth meant expanding the realm of experience: "My favorite assignments are those that let me use my imagination and my experiences to learn about things like poverty that I have only seen from a distance. I need to realize what is happening around me."

BETH BOONE



● Starting Over

Whenever I'm trying one more time to come up with the perfect assignment, I recall a frame from Walt Disney's *Cinderella*: the homely stepsisters struggle against all odds to force a size five, AAA slipper onto a size nine, EE foot. Certainly, I never intentionally plan an ineffective assignment, but I've had my share of disappointing classes where, like the stepsisters, I'm reduced to pushing as hard as I can on a shoe that just will not fit. I'm eternally seduced by the hope that what is interesting to me and what is effective for me will be interesting and effective for my writing classes even though some twenty years and who knows how many experiences separate us. Although I know my most successful assignments focus on the issues and interests of my students, I all too often become an Esmerelda in class. Despite my best intentions, the "shoe" I design at my desk is sometimes not tailored to the student foot. When I find myself pushing and pulling quite unsuccessfully, I face the bad news and . . . start over. This takes courage. And more work, but do I want to resemble the ugly stepsister if I have a chance to produce Cinderella?

ISABEL STEILBERG, VCU

Beth Boone, a former teacher in Richmond and now an instructor at VCU, edits this column.

Please submit ideas for the Spring, 1983 issue to

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Cross-Disciplinary Guidelines

MARY GRATTAN

There's nothing like working in a college Writing Center to force one to reexamine the art of designing writing assignments. Students come from a variety of disciplines—from history to nursing to secretarial science—seeking aid (sometimes) and comfort (always) as they struggle through business letters, research reports, and essay exams. Many students experience difficulty because they lack experience in writing. They have no Platonic Idea, if you will, of The Book Review or The Abstract, because they have never written one and, in most cases, never even read one. These lack-of-exposure situations pose few problems for the Writing Center tutor, because he has only to produce a sample paper in the particular genre, point out the general steps, and ask a few leading questions to get the student thinking in channels appropriate to that genre.

But then there are the students who come because they simply do not understand what their instructor is asking them to do. Many times, the problem is not necessarily that they are inexperienced writers; rather, the assignment itself is written in jargon or language too sophisticated or vague, or worse yet is just downright confusing. At this point, the Writing Center instructor has several options: Sometimes he can simply paraphrase the assignment in words the student writer can understand; in more difficult cases, he must don his most diplomatic vestments and meet with the classroom instructor to clarify the assignment for himself. The temptation in these latter cases is to feel a little superior to those teachers who have not communicated effectively with their students. ("But then what would a history or sociology teacher know about writing assignments. We English teachers are the only real experts; we assign many more papers per course than other instructors and, being trained in language, we certainly know how to write so that students can understand what we want from them.") The irony, of course, is that students bring to the Writing Center questions about their English assignments almost as often as they bring their papers from other classes.

In light of the difficulties our students have experienced with the broad range of papers required of them, I offer several general guidelines concerning the art of designing written assignments. Doubtless, all of these points have been made at various times over the years in the literature of education and composition. Yet, in my view, these points apply to papers in *all* disciplines, and they certainly are not limited to college level assignments, but apply equally to high school and even middle school. I know I have profited from recognizing my own haste and shortsightedness mirrored on occasion in the assignments of my colleagues, and I believe others will profit as well from these few basic guidelines.

(1) Set up the assignment as a problem to be solved or a question to be answered by the student. Connect the paper to a concept already

introduced through class discussion, reading, or previous writing. If possible, build in an audience for the paper other than the instructor.

Observation of students in our Writing Center suggests that students become more involved with a paper that challenges them to solve a problem rather than simply survey a field of literature. Problem-solving provides an organizational framework on which ideas may be hung as the student proceeds logically through his task. If the student sees the connection between his paper and the rest of his coursework, he is less likely to complain about having to write a paper. He does not regard the paper as an end in itself, but rather as a means to mastering the whole course content. Providing the student with an audience gives him some basis for experimenting with appropriate tone and word choice, and often even affects his choice of arguments and examples. For example, a student asked to write a paper on "The Failure (or Success) of Reaganomics" may get bogged down in trying to discuss the history of U.S. economy, the pros and cons of certain economic theories, or uninformed opinions of his friends or relatives concerning certain budgetary items. However, if the student is given a similar assignment, but in more precise terms, he is more likely to focus on the central issues and involve himself in the reasoning process. For example, the following approach could be used: "In the attached editorial, a *Richmond News Leader* editor discusses why he feels a flat rate income tax is needed. Pretend you are a member of one of the four groups we have discussed in class (welfare recipients, elderly on Social Security, middle class homeowner, large corporation), and write a response to the editor giving that person/corporation's perspective on the flat rate income tax."

(2) If the paper to be assigned involves research, verify the availability of appropriate sources. It may seem beyond the call of duty to visit the nearby libraries, scouring the card catalog, periodical indexes, and vertical files for relevant information; after all, some say, is not that the students' job? I believe it is the students' job to locate their own material, but I also believe instructors are building in unnecessary frustration when they send inexperienced writers off on a treasure hunt for which there may be no treasure at all, or at least no treasure within a twenty-mile radius of the school. In fact, we may be building in more than frustration; we may be setting ourselves up to reward a student whose brother happens to go to a large university in another city or whose mother happens to work for an agency giving her easy access to pamphlets not generally obtainable by the average citizen, penalizing the student who has no such "contacts." If a paper is intended to be a means of mastering a certain concept or body of information, the instructor must be sure the appropriate research materials are within reasonable reach of the student. If the paper is to be an exercise in the art of tracking down obscure information, then we might be justified in sending the students off into the unknown. Even then, I have misgivings: If we don't know what information is available, how will we

be able to judge fairly the students' success in locating an acceptable amount of information?

(3) Type the assignment instructions on a sheet of paper and distribute a copy of each student. Limit these instructions to one page, if at all possible. Go over the entire assignment sheet in class.

Such advice may seem totally unnecessary to some, but many students seem to get their assignments from a brief oral description at the end of a class period or from a hastily scrawled phrase on the blackboard. In such cases, two students exposed to the exact same assignment can copy down two rather different interpretations of what is expected of them. Over the course of the term, the instructor may repeat the assignment several times, but alter it unintentionally each time, perhaps because he is still refining it in his own mind. Such a situation can lead to confusion on the student's part and an unfair grading standard on the teacher's part, for the student who most successfully guesses the teacher's intentions will come up with the highest mark.

Writing out the assignment gives the instructor a chance to (a) read and revise his wording, (b) bounce the idea off a colleague, (c) ensure that each student is starting from the same set of instructions, and (d) ensure that the evaluation of the papers will be based on the actual instructions and criteria provided to each student at the beginning of the term.

(4) Describe the format in which you expect the final paper to appear—abstract, review, traditional research paper. Name the parts of the assignment if you expect a standard structure—thesis statement, case summary, application, future implications. Show or attach a sample paper or place a former student's paper on reserve in the library.

Such detail may seem to some a block to creativity. However, if the paper is expected to follow the traditions of a certain compositional genre, it is dangerous to assume all students have been exposed to that genre. If a paper is to be judged according to a preconceived order or plan that exists in the instructor's mind, it is only fair to place that plan before the students. Even among rather experienced student writers, such a procedure helps to reduce the unnecessary anxiety that so often arises over format, freeing students to concentrate their efforts and anxieties where they belong—on content.

(5) Set out any further criteria for evaluation such as deadlines (for thesis, outline, rough draft, or other preparatory documents), length of paper, number of sources required, procedures for quoting or otherwise citing outside sources. Also on the assignment sheet, include policies regarding such matters as the possibility of rewrites, the weight of grammar, late paper penalties, plagiarism, or other situations that might arise concerning the paper's acceptability.

Criteria should be spelled out on the assignment sheet so that all students are playing by the same set of rules from the very beginning. Setting up a series of deadlines can be very helpful for students; it not only discourages them from doing everything at the last minute,

but it also gives the classroom instructor a framework for handling questions and problems that may typically arise during certain steps of the writing process.

(6) Emphasize support services available to the student. Remind the students of your own office hours, and suggest an out of class workshop session if students seem particularly anxious about the assignment. If research is a part of the paper, be sure the library's hours and services are known to the students. A tour of the library is often most effective when undertaken in the context of a particular written assignment. Be sure to talk with the librarian about the research assignment prior to unleashing an entire class on him, and send him a copy of the assignment sheet so that he will be well prepared to assist your students. Finally, remind your students of other services available to student writers, such as the Writing Center, tutoring services, or learning labs.

(7) Learn from past mistakes. At some time or other, all instructors have designed assignments that were not successful. If students are asking questions of complaining about an assignment, listen and take notes. Transfer these notes to your copy of the assignment and keep them in your file so that you can refine the assignment or even remind yourself to abandon it altogether in future classes. On the other hand, if an assignment works well, make a note of your success. As a part of your personal review of writing assignments, ask your colleagues if they would be willing to pool their successful assignments and set up a resource file. An interdisciplinary exchange of assignments and related ideas, such as the one we have in our college Writing Center, can be a first step toward building strong writing components in all disciplines of the school.

Mary Grattan is an assistant professor at J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College.

Horace G. Danner, *Words From the Romance Languages*, Imprimis Press: Manassas, 1980, pp. 226.

Reviewed by Alan McLeod

Danner's book is an attempt to build vocabulary: on one page is a listing of a word family and disguised roots with common elements and cognates from Romance languages. The back of the page contains a *Clavis* or key, a list of explanatory notes. Students are encouraged to work through the lists; if they do so, they may well develop an understanding of a Latin-based vocabulary in a modestly associative manner. Approximately 100 different word families are presented. Some students in college preparatory programs may find the book useful, even at a cost of \$7.